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ABSTRACT

The fact that gender desegregation of vocational programs has not yet been achieved might be related to labor force occupational segregation by gender. Social theorists view schooling inequities as mirrors of social structure, whereby schools track students to maintain social stratification. Mirroring the labor market, education has segregated students into programs based on factors such as their class background, racial/ethnic classification, and gender. Although current enrollments of females reflect greater numbers of students in programs nontraditional for their gender, female students remain clustered in the service and clerical occupations. An examination of 1988-89 enrollments in vocational programs in nine of Connecticut's comprehensive high schools shows that they mirror national trends and have made little progress in reversing gender segregation. Follow-up data on graduates from these schools support this fact. Vocational education can empower students in traditionally female programs by providing them with knowledge about the following: (1) workplace issues that will directly affect them; (2) issues of self-esteem and identity that shape females' work lives; (3) peer relationships and managerial practices in employment settings; and (4) contemporary labor issues on pay equity and comparable worth, sexual harassment, pregnancy and child-care benefits, promotion, and career advancement. (YLB)

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FEMALES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS OF THE LABOR MARKET

by Richard Lakes, Ph.D. and Alice M. Pritchard, M.A.

Equity educators across the nation continue to voice their concerns about vocational education's tracking of female students into gender stereotyped careers. Female access to historically male-dominated occupations--often characterized by higher salaries, benefits, and long career paths--has been largely restricted. Females have been relegated to training for fields stereotyped as female or "pink-collar". They receive training in business & office, home economics, or health and distributive occupations which generally result in low pay, limited mobility, and restricted advancement. Many vocational education courses are sex segregated with female students outnumbering males in programs traditional for their gender. Thus, gender segregation in vocational schools mirrors gender divisions in the labor force. That gender desegregation of vocational programs has not yet been achieved might be related to labor force occupational segregation by gender. This report outlines gender segregation in vocational programs in Connecticut and outlines strategies to counteract these limitations on females' educational and occupational opportunities.

GENDER SEGREGATION IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Social theorists, such as Bowles & Gintis (1976), view schooling inequities as mirrors of social structure, whereby, schools track students to maintain social stratification. Social relationships in schools vary, the theorists argue, since "different levels of education feed workers into different levels of the occupational structure" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.132). Through curricular differentiation, students are presented subject matter closely associated with their eventual career paths. Mirroring the labor market, education has segregated students into programs based on factors such as their class background, racial/ethnic classification, and gender. The question we ask is: what is the appropriate role for public education to play? Should schools mirror the market place? Are schools replicating prejudice and inequality?

Historically, discriminatory patterns of enrolling girls in traditional occupations, claims Vetter (1989), "were based upon stereotypes of what was 'appropriate' for women to be involved in and reflected their involvement in the home and the provision of services to others in the marketplace" (p.94). What is the pattern of gender segregregation in female traditional programs in the United States? National enrollment data of vocational students in 1976 reveals that females were channelled into four major occupational groupings: Health Occupations (69.6 percent), Consumer Homemaking Education (76.5 percent), Home Economics Related Occupations (74.2 percent), and Office/Business Education (61.2 percent). The only program that approached equity was Distributive (Marketing) Education with 40.7 percent females and 59.3 percent males (Bureau of Adult Occupational Education, 1976). In 1984, program-level enrollments for females were highest

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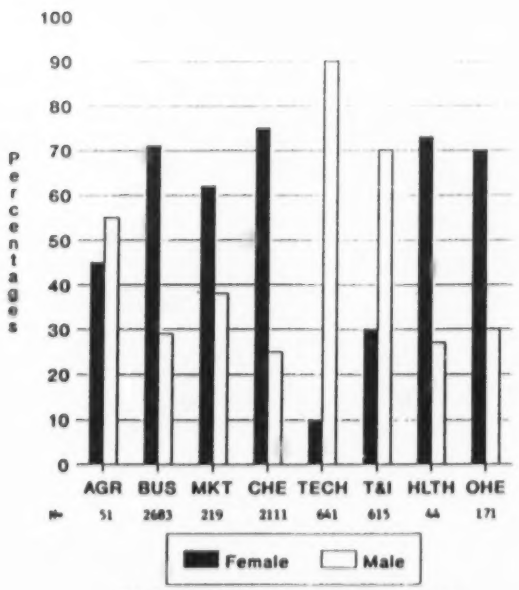
in Community Health (87 percent), Cosmetology (92 percent), and Clerical/Secretarial (92 percent)[Vocational Education Data System of the U.S. Department of Labor cited in Wolf, 1991, p.5]. Although current enrollments of females reflect greater numbers of students in programs nontraditional for their gender, female students remain clustered in the service and clerical occupations.

What is the pattern of gender segregation in Connecticut's vocational programs? To address this question, researchers at the Vocational Equity Research, Training, and Evaluation Center (VERTEC) examined 1988-9 enrollments in vocational programs in Connecticut's comprehensive high schools. Nine schools were randomly selected to represent vocational program offerings in urban, rural, and suburban settings in the state. Pupil enrollment data was collected on eight vocational programs in Agricultural Education, Business Education, Consumer Home Economics, Health Occupations, Marketing Education, Occupational Home Economics, Technology Education, and Trade & Industrial Education. Enrollment data presented in Chart A show the total distribution of females and males in the vocational programs mentioned.

CHART A. VOCATIONAL ENROLLMENTS
Programs by Gender (1988-89), N=6535



SOURCE: CT State Department of Education
Bureau of Evaluation & Assessment

This chart clearly demonstrates that females are over-represented in four occupations traditional for their gender: Business Education, Consumer Home Economics, Health Occupations, and Occupational Home Economics; approach equitable enrollment in Marketing and Agricultural Education; and are under-represented in Technology Education and Trade & Industrial Education traditionally male-dominated programs. Connecticut vocational programs show little progress in reversing gender segregation. Thus, they mirror the national trends noted above. This fact is further supported by follow-up data on graduates from these schools.

Follow-up data on 1,748 graduates from vocational programs in the sample schools that same year reveal several interesting patterns of school completion. First, female graduates represent 84 percent of the students in Occupational Home Economics and only 18 percent of the students in Trade & Industrial. Second, for student completers in the two vocational programs mentioned, wage rates were inequitable. Wages were highest in Trade & Industrial ($7.50) where females were underrepresented; and lowest in Occupational Home Economics ($5.38) where they were overrepresented. Finally, in a comparison of female student completion patterns by race (see TABLE 1.), Black females comprise 67 percent and White females only 10 percent of the graduates in Occupational Home Economics. The clustering of minorities in that program--the lowest paying occupation--may demonstrate the double jeopardy of race and gender faced by Black females.

TABLE 1. STUDENT COMPLETIONS (1988-89)
Percentages by Race & Gender, N=1748

PROG	BLACK/F	BLACK/M	WHITE/F	WHITE/M	OTHER
BUS	38% (440)	10% (109)	37% (422)	10% (120)	5% (52)
MKT	19% (32)	14% (24)	42% (72)	18% (30)	7% (12)
OHE	66% (52)	13% (10)	10% (8)	4% (3)	8% (6)
T&I	6% (9)	28% (44)	12% (19)	52% (83)	3% (5)

SOURCE: CT State Department of Education

These data indicate that Connecticut has a long way to go in recruiting and training women for nontraditional high wage work. The continued segregation of females into programs traditional for their gender limits their occupational and economic possibilities for the future. This segregation prepares females for jobs which offer them little security, benefits, chance for advancement, or money. Connecticut schools are in fact preparing many female students for lives of economic insecurity. However, Connecticut schools and educators can reverse this trend. Historically, the state has successfully trained males for well paying occupations. Now, these efforts must be extended and accelerated to prepare female students for the labor force and increase their opportunities for occupational and economic success.

Educators do not have to surrender to marketplace demands. "Schools do not have to mirror economic imperatives; they can also respond to social imperatives," claim Bastian and Associates (1990, p.632). In their words:

If education were constructed around the social needs of children, families, communities, and a democratic society, the priority would be to endow all children with the basic and higher-order skills needed to fulfill personal and citizenship roles. The mission of schooling would be individual and social empowerment, which itself would promote more equitable chances of survival in the labor market. (p.632)

EMPOWERING FEMALES IN TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

How can vocational education empower students in traditionally female programs? "By discussing workplace issues, by sharing problems, insights and ideas, students can begin to experience the potential of their collective strength" writes Valli (1986, p.208). Female students can be empowered, she charges, with knowledge about workplace issues which will directly affect them. In addition, attention must be given to issues of self-esteem and identity which shape females' work lives.

Vocational educators may wish to consider exploration of equity issues based upon the organization of traditional and nontraditional work. That is, classroom topics could address various questions of peer relationships and managerial practices in a number of employment settings. All students can benefit from classroom discussion of the realities of workplaces. For example, female students in nontraditional vocational programs may encounter peer resistance to their presence in male-dominated laboratories. Students should learn that biased practices marginalize female and minority workers often promoting feelings of alienation and inadequacy. Teachers can help students analyze and counteract these experiences in the classroom and help them prepare for the realities of work life.

Contemporary labor issues on pay equity and comparable worth, sexual harassment, pregnancy and child-care benefits, promotion and career advancement are also important subject matter for vocational classroom discussions about workers' rights and employment conditions. Valli believes that vocational educators should encourage student investigation of their own (co-op) places of work:

Students should discuss what they like and dislike about the work they are assigned; what they have learned from their work; why they think tasks are divided the way they are; who decides how the workplace is organized and what the reasons might be for those decisions; and if they can think of any way they would prefer work to be performed or distributed (1986, p. 205).

Valli's study of high school students in cooperative office occupations is useful in that it promotes vocational equity for female students in programs traditional for their gender. Attention to traditional occupations signals an important addition to gender-bias elimination strategies that focused primarily upon access for women into nontraditional occupational fields.

CONCLUSION

Schools and educators have an obligation to prepare their students for the future and to provide them with the resources they will need to be economically successful. Connecticut schools are not meeting this obligation to their female students. Educators must continue to counteract the trends in occupational segregation by gender in their vocational programs. It is essential to end the practice of sex segregated occupational training that relegates women, especially women of color, to low wage, dead end jobs. The recruitment, retention, training, and placing of females in nontraditional occupations must be a priority for all schools. In addition, educators must begin to empower their females students in both traditional and nontraditional programs by making them aware of workplace issues such as sexual harrassment and equitable worth. Only then will females in both traditional and nontraditional work be prepared to challenge the existing biases in the nation's labor market.

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